

Abraham Lincoln

and

Pennsylvania



RISING to his feet near the close of a long program featuring a two-hour address by Edward Everett, Abraham Lincoln spoke "a few appropriate remarks" at ceremonies dedicating the national cemetery at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on November 19, 1863. Thus inconspicuously did Pennsylvania, which had been the birthplace of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, furnish the stage for the third of our nation's three greatest documents.

It is through the Gettysburg Address that Lincoln is most closely associated with Pennsylvania, but there are a number of other ways in which the great Civil War President had close ties with the Commonwealth founded by William Penn.

Like hundreds of thousands of his fellow citizens of the middle western states, Lincoln's ancestors had lived in Pennsylvania, had moved southward through the Great Valley into Virginia, had passed through Cumberland Gap into Kentucky, and then had moved across the Ohio River into the Old Northwest. His people were a part of the tide of settlement which pushed the frontier westward, redeeming the land from the forest and building the new states of the Ohio and Mississippi valleys.

Lincoln's knowledge of his Pennsylvania ancestry was exceedingly vague. In a brief biographical sketch prepared for Jesse Fell in December, 1859, he wrote: "My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County, Virginia, to Kentucky, about 1781 or 2, where a year or two later he was killed by Indians, not in battle, but by stealth. . . . His ancestors, who were Quakers, went to Virginia from Berks County,

Pennsylvania. An effort to identify them with the New-England family of the same name ended in nothing more definite, than a similarity of Christian names in both families, such as Enoch, Levi, Mordecai, Solomon, Abraham, and the like."

Later research has established the New England connections which Lincoln was unable to make. Mordecai Lincoln, his great-great-grandfather, came to Pennsylvania with his brother Abraham in 1720. Sons of Mordecai Lincoln of Scituate, Massachusetts, the two brothers had come to New Jersey before 1714 and settled at or near Middletown. Here Mordecai was married to Hannah Salter of Freehold. When he moved to Pennsylvania in 1720, he settled in Chester County, becoming a partner of Samuel Nutt, Sr., and William Bransom in the operation of Coventry Forge on French Creek, one of the earliest iron enterprises in Pennsylvania. He sold his interest in the forge for five hundred pounds in 1726, and after a brief return to New Jersey took up residence in Amity (now Exeter) Township in present Berks County as early as 1728.

His first wife having died about 1727, he was married in 1729 to Mary Robeson and in the same year leased a thousand-acre farm in present Exeter Township, which he later bought. On this tract, not far from Birdsboro, stands a one-and-a-half-story stone structure, comprising two sections built at different times. According to local tradition, the older portion was built by Mordecai Lincoln in 1733, but documentary proof of this tradition is lacking. Curiously enough, the Mordecai Lincoln farm in Pennsylvania lies only four miles from the Daniel Boone Homestead, from whence Daniel and



The Lincoln Homestead in Berks County

his father Squire migrated to North Carolina in 1750.

Relations between these two famous Pennsylvania families must have been close since both took an active part in public affairs; Mordecai Lincoln serving as a commissioner for defense against the Indians in 1728, as a justice of the peace, and as an inspector of roads. Abraham Lincoln, youngest son of Mordecai and Mary (Robeson) Lincoln, married Anne Boone, first cousin of Daniel Boone. This marriage, incidentally, provides proof that the Pennsylvania Lincolns were not Quakers, since the Exeter Friends Meeting censured Anne Boone, a Quaker, for marrying "out of meeting." This Abraham Lincoln was born after his father's death in 1736.

Mordecai Lincoln's oldest son John, great-grandfather of President Lincoln, was born in New Jersey in 1716. He learned the weaver's trade and in 1743 married Rebecca Flowers Morris of Caernarvon Township, Lancaster County. He bought several tracts of land in Lancaster and Berks counties, but in 1765 he sold his holdings in Pennsylvania and moved to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, settling a few miles north of present Harrisonburg in what is now Rockingham County. His son Abraham, grandfather of President Lincoln, was born in Pennsylvania in 1744 and emigrated to Virginia and later to Kentucky as described in the quotation from Lincoln above.

With the migration of John Lincoln to Virginia, Pennsylvania's association with President Lincoln's direct forebears ceased. Others of Mordecai Lincoln's children remained as did those of his brother

Abraham, who came with him to Pennsylvania in 1720, so that President Lincoln had many distant cousins living in the Commonwealth when he occupied the White House.

Direct association between Pennsylvania and Lincoln began after he became a prominent figure in the new Republican party, which was organized on a national basis at Pittsburgh on February 22, 1856. This party was the direct result of the quarrels between the North and South over the question of the extension of slavery into the new territory acquired as a result of the Mexican War. In its earliest form, the dispute centered about an amendment offered by Congressman David Wilmot of Towanda, Pennsylvania, on August 8, 1846, to an appropriation bill to provide funds for negotiations to end the war with Mexico. This Wilmot Proviso specifically barred slavery from lands acquired from Mexico. Curiously enough, Abraham Lincoln was a Whig congressman from Illinois at this time, and he later wrote that he must have voted for the Wilmot Proviso at least forty times during his term.

As the dispute over slavery grew more bitter, Abraham Lincoln came to national prominence as a Republican candidate for United States Senator from Illinois through his famous debates with Stephen A. Douglas in 1858. Lincoln lost the senatorial election, but his strenuous opposition to the further extension of slavery into the territories and his creditable showing against Douglas, the leading contender for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1860, made him a national figure and a possible Republican candidate for the presidency.

To the strongly antislavery Quakers of southeastern Pennsylvania he seemed a particularly suitable candidate; and it was this fact which led Joseph J. Lewis, publisher of the *Chester County Times* at West Chester, to print in the newspaper on February 11, 1860, the first published biography of Abraham Lincoln. Based upon the short sketch which Lincoln had prepared for Jesse Fell in 1859, it was about six times as long as the original and was rewritten by Lewis to appeal particularly to Pennsylvania voters, who were favorable to a high tariff to protect their manufactured products from foreign competition.

As the presidential election year of 1860 came closer, United States Senator Simon Cameron obtained control of the Pennsylvania delegation to the Republican national convention in Chicago. Many of the delegates were unsympathetic to

Cameron and tended to follow the lead of Andrew Gregg Curtin and David Wilmot. On the first ballot in the convention, Pennsylvania gave Cameron 47½ votes and Lincoln only 4. Since it was obvious that Cameron could not be nominated, there was considerable maneuvering before the second ballot and a promise by David Davis, one of Lincoln's Illinois friends, that Cameron should receive a position in Lincoln's cabinet if he were elected. On the second ballot, Pennsylvania gave 48 votes to Lincoln, and this, in the opinion of Professor Reinhard H. Luthin, "did more than any single thing to tip the scales in favor of Lincoln." He was nominated on the third ballot. In the election that fall, Pennsylvania gave its 27 electoral votes to Lincoln and provided him with a popular vote of 268,030 to 208,412 for all his opponents.

Following the election the nation was plunged into the secession crisis, which became even more serious in February, 1861, with the formation of the Confederate States of America. About the same time Lincoln left Illinois on a long circuitous journey to Washington for his inauguration on March 4. Stopping at Pittsburgh on February 15, he made a speech emphasizing his approval of a protective tariff and assuring the people that the existing crisis of secession was an "artificial" one which would pass if people would keep their self-possession. Going on to Ohio, New York, and New Jersey, he re-entered Pennsylvania on February 21, and early the next morning participated in flag-raising ceremonies at Independence Hall in Philadelphia to celebrate Washington's Birthday. Returning to his hotel for breakfast, Lincoln then boarded a train for Harrisburg.

The night before in Philadelphia, he had been informed that a plot had been formed to assassinate him on the morning of February 23, either by derailing his train from Harrisburg to Baltimore and killing its occupants or by attacking his carriage as it went from one railroad station to another in Baltimore. Lincoln insisted on carrying out his trip to Harrisburg, but agreed to special arrangements to upset the plot.

Arriving in Harrisburg about 1:30 P.M. on February 22, he made brief responses to addresses of welcome by Governor Curtin at the Jones House and by the speakers of the two houses of the legislature at the Capitol. After a busy day of receiving the public and meeting many people, Lincoln made quiet preparations for departure. About 6:00 P.M. he was driven from the hotel to the station, where he secretly boarded a special train

for Philadelphia. In order to prevent any mishaps, the telegraph lines out of Harrisburg were cut, and special guards were stationed at key points along the route. At West Philadelphia he left the train and transferred to the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad. He reached Baltimore about 3:30 A.M., where the cars of his train were pulled by horses from the President Street Station to the Camden Station of the Baltimore and Ohio. He journeyed on safely to Washington, arriving about sunrise.

In the war years which followed, Governor Curtin and the people of Pennsylvania were pillars of strength for the Union cause. The Commonwealth furnished troops to fight in both the east and the west; and its farms, factories, and mines supplied the food, clothing, and munitions so essential to victory. Of almost equal importance was the moral support given to Lincoln's administration when war weariness and political disputes were weakening the Union effort. This was strikingly demonstrated in the famous Altoona Conference in September, 1862.

Under the laws then existing, the federal government was dependent upon the states for supplying the troops needed by the armies. Many of the governors, particularly in New England, were convinced that Lincoln was not doing enough toward emancipation of the slaves, and they were likewise displeased with certain military leaders, particularly General George B. McClellan, commander of the Army of the Potomac. Some of them even hinted that further troops for the armies



*The Gettysburg Address Memorial at Gettysburg
National Military Park*

would not be supplied unless their wishes regarding slavery were agreed to. In the summer of 1862, Governor Curtin aided Lincoln by persuading other governors to join him in an appeal requesting Lincoln to issue a call for more troops.

There was still danger, however, that the "Radical" governors would meet and adopt resolutions unfriendly to Lincoln's policies. Curtin, after consulting with Lincoln, issued a call for a conference of governors at Altoona "to take measures for the more active support of the government." The conference was held September 24-26, 1862, as planned and was attended by many of the Radical governors. Aided by Lincoln's issuance of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, however, Curtin and the moderate governors were able to restrain the Radicals and make the conference a meeting in support of the administration and a more vigorous military effort in the war.

In the following year, Pennsylvania was invaded by Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia in a campaign climaxed by the repulse of Pickett's charge at Gettysburg on the afternoon of July 3. The frightful carnage of the struggle and a desire to erect a memorial to the men who had died there moved the Commonwealth to purchase land for the erection of a "national" cemetery. David Wills of Gettysburg was in charge of the project, and it was he who invited Edward Everett, former president of Harvard, to deliver an oration for the occasion. Almost as an afterthought, Wills on November 2 invited President Lincoln to attend and as Chief Executive to "set apart these grounds to their sacred use by a few appropriate remarks."

Lincoln arrived in Gettysburg on the evening of November 18, 1863, and stayed at the home of David Wills, where on the morning of November 19 he wrote the "second draft" of his address. That afternoon at the cemetery he spoke a few

earnest words which have deservedly become the classic expression of American idealism for all time. In them, Lincoln and Pennsylvania became forever united. No visitor to Gettysburg can ever forget the majestic simplicity of the stirring words uttered there in the autumn afternoon of 1863:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln

